Militant Anarchism and the Reality in Spain

Federica Montseny
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"They Shall Not Pass!"

They shall not pass! E'en should they win the day,

Their vict'ry turns to dust and ashes still;
What tho' the tyrants should our bodies slay,
The spirit free lives on and 'scapes their will.
It shall not be! Let them do what they may,
They shall not pass!
They shall not pass! E'en should they win the day,

When all have given their lives for liberty,
Tyrants will know the price they have to pay
T'enslave a people fighting to be free.
It shall not be! Let them do what they may,
They shall not pass!
They shall not pass! E'en should they win the day,
When men as yet unborn shall read the story,
They'll judge 'twixt those who stood in Freedom's way,
And us who died for her; whose is the glory.
It shall not be! Let them do what they may,
They shall not pass!

What tho' with hireling hordes they burn and slay,

And stone built fortresses before them fall,
There's something stronger yet shall bar the way,
Our firm resolve that still defies them all.
Therefore we cry, "Let them do what they may,
They shall not pass!"

-From the Catalan of Apelles Mastres.

"I wish to say that we Anarchists have never changed our position. We are Anarchists as of old and still pursue the same ideals. In no part of the world before has Anarchism existed as we find it to-day in Spain. It is necessary for us to understand the manner in which the military putsch of July 19th was brought about and the impossibility of the events being foreseen.

"We tried many times before to speed on the social revolution in Spain; attempted to stir up the feelings of the people and to raise the banner of Libertarian Communism. Since the establishment of the Republic we were the only ones who kept the masses alive; the only ones who remained faithful to their revolutionary creed. Without our continued vigilance, Spain to-day would be very different. A timid democracy, a reformist socialism would have held back the masses. Our constancy, same might call it our madness, was necessary to wear down the oppressive forces of the old democracy which, in Spain, was a hundred years behind the times.
gatory. Love, as the basis of life will bind us together. But we must create in each person a sense of responsibility in order that each one of us can have the right to enjoy all his rights. This is an unique movement for us all, because circumstances to-day in Spain have never before existed during any other revolution. Neither the French nor the Russian revolution. To-day, a sense of sacrifice impels us to renounce our aspirations and individual interests for the well-being of all. It is this sense of responsibility which shows us the path of duty and assists us in performing it. In this way, we will avoid the fatal mistake of dictatorship. In Spain, we should have enough intelligence, enough sense of individual and collective responsibility to do for ourselves that which would be imposed upon us by a dictatorship. Very soon we will give to the world the example of a free land, that stood up without arms opposed, as a single man, to fascism, to the mentality of capitalism. It will be an example, worthy of being followed by the rest of the world. We are proud of our responsibility. The greatest joy of our lives is a determination to sacrifice all-to give all-that this dream will be realised-the union of the proletariat to obtain our fundamental aims:

BREAD AND FREEDOM FOR ALL!

"And then came the military revolt which, by the heroic action of the workers, was quelled. This action of the workers constitutes, perhaps one of the greatest events of the past years.

"After the Russian Revolution a strong movement of the masses developed in Spain, which is the best reply to fascism. Spain is the first and only nation to face up to fascism squarely and to throw herself into a revolution that is genuinely Spanish, completely original, and having no relation with the Russian Revolution or the recent uprisings in Austria. I do not think I say too much when I say that if the people had not been educated by us in a revolutionary manner, the popular reaction of the masses would not have been possible. That is our triumph. It is the most precious laurel we, as Anarchists, treasure. It is necessary to separate the ideal from the real at the point where the ideal becomes stationary and fixed. An ideal which becomes stagnant, which has no flexibility, which has no adjustibility, which cannot react and whose representatives cannot respond in accordance with circumstances such an ideal is destined to be set apart.

"But we Spanish Anarchists had the capacity to do this. Without departing from our Anarchist ideal and without renouncing its true meaning in face of the historical situation and the Spanish movement, we knew how to adapt ourselves. Authority is something from which we are constantly subtracting, of which there remains always a residue, and which we attempt to make smaller and smaller. This is the moral and physical principle which we Anarchists put into practice in Spain. For example, if on July 19th we had attempted, as we could have done, to proclaim Libertarian Communism in Catalonia, the results would have been disastrous, just as it would have been had a like attempt been made by the totalitarian communists or by the socialists. Although it may be our aim, to attempt a total conquest at that time would have meant a broken front, and consequently failure. The fact is that
we were the first to modify our aspirations, the first to understand that the struggle against International fascism was in itself great enough. The struggle is so great that the triumph over fascism alone is worth the sacrifice of our lives. Fascism which desires to become the master of all those who are free in spirit, Everyone—from the most moderate Republican to the most extreme Anarchist—has placed their hope and faith in the struggle which unites them.

"There are Anarchists in other parts of the world who are unable to comprehend the position of the Spanish Anarchists. I do not pretend to censor these Anarchists. For us, our position had to be one thing or the other. To continue in opposition, which would have been impossible under the circumstances, or to take our place as the circumstances commanded.

"And so in obedience to circumstances we entered the central government and the generalidad. We think by doing so we will avoid a repetition of the fate of the Anarchist movement in other countries where other organisations assumed the direction of the revolution to the detriment of the Anarchists. This cannot take place in Spain because of our determined action, because of the constructive significance we are giving to the revolution inspired by the ideals of Anarchism.

"No one but ourselves can realise the extraordinary human effort it represented for those who, individually and collectively, for more than a century have specialised in criticism and opposition, to become transformed suddenly from a destructive to a constructive force. A system we had vowed to destroy and which we frankly did not think would crumble so soon in Spain fell so quickly that when the moment came we were left somewhat confused before the fundamental practical problems of economic order facing us. And it was our good fortune that among all the forces fighting fascism in spite of the defects, the failures, the errors and inexperience in that critical hour, we constituted a

There is, therefore, no solution possible other than an economy directed by the workers through their organisations of control—through the workers’ syndicates. In the political sense, federalism will provide us with the structure whereby each region can organise its own life according to its natural resources. With the political unity of the new Spain established on a basis of federalism and with the guarantee of the intrinsic rights of the workers, the economic unity of the working class imposes itself as a matter of course. Thus the proletarian organisations which, formerly, were directed against capitalism will be converted into administrative organisations of the new economy.

The ideological differences between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. are bound to disappear under the common purpose of the working class. The union of these two great syndicates for the new economy will constitute an unique effort for the formation of a workers, directed economy. The directed economy of Roosevelt was aborted by the capitalist class which is not capable of making sacrifices. In Russia, Communist Party administration has succeeded in reconstructing economy—but at the cost of a dictatorship and the submission of a whole people to mere obedience. It is our idea to construct a society directed by the workers’ organisations having the complete control of the economic wealth of the land.

In order to fully realise our aspirations, we must create in the masses of the people the sense of sacrifice and responsibility that has been the characteristic of the anarchist movement throughout its historic development in Spain. It will be this spirit of sacrifice that will enable us to overcome all the difficulties and bear all the privations that will be necessary for the realisation of the new economic reconstruction. The greatest individual austerity and a complete sense of responsibility is necessary for the fulfilment of our aims.

The love of liberty and the sense of human dignity are the basic elements of the Anarchist creed. We need no messiah and no sterile conception of a god menacing us with hell and pur-
of the working class. There is no longer any question of re-
constructing Spain, after the civil war, on a basis of private
property. Our land, ravaged by destruction, will demand un-
told sacrifices. There are vast tracts of land mutilated by shells
and bombs; territories, under the heel of the fascists, which are
uncultivated, due to the passive resistance of the peasants; and
there is the incalculable destruction of the whole economy of
the land. All this will demand an intense organisation of pro-
duction under responsible and efficient administration.

An economy directed by the workers alone can solve this
problem. The workers will be prepared to sacrifice all for the
triumph of the revolution. They will work eight-ten-twelve-or
more hours per day, if need be, in order to intensify produc-
tion and reconstruct, as quickly as possible all that has been
destroyed by the war. Knowing that it is, for the welfare of
their children, the workers will respond enthusiastically to all
the demands made upon them. They will work with the same
intensity with which to-day they are fighting against Franco
and Mola for their redemption from ages of slavery. A slavery
that has made them always the victims of private interests.

That is why a fascist victory is impossible. Because it must
not be forgotten that this is not only a civil war-a social war is
also being waged. It is the war of the common people against
the rich, against the militarists, against the politicians—all of
whom were responsible for the misery and poverty of the pro-
etariat. The political parties were incapable of creating a new
moral value in Spain and were unable to oppose the military
conspirators. They were mere accomplices of the traitor gener-
als.

No! the people of Spain will never consent to work again for
capitalist interests. People who freely endanger their lives for
a common cause do not take payment in money. They will de-
mand their rights and their freedom, and will take over the di-
rection of their own destiny. Rights for which they have strug-
gled and conquered.
and to maintain the unity of all the anti-fascist forces—
Republicans, Socialists, Communists and Anarchists.

"But imagine the panorama once the war is over with the
different ideological forces that will attempt to impose them-
selves, one against the other. The war over, the problem will
rise in Spain with the same characteristics as it had in France
and Russia. We must prepare ourselves now. We must declare
our point of view so that the other organisations, will know what to expect. . . . We must look for the platform,
for the point of contact which will permit us with the greatest
amount of freedom, and with a minimum plan of economical
realisation to continue on our road until we reach the goal.

"We have already spoken of what we want, once the war is
ended. What we say to-day we said before the war, Something
consubstantial with the very history of Spain, with the aspira-
tions of the people manifested in every moment of their lives.
Every historic movement of Spain has affirmed always the at-
titude of the people against a central and absorbing power.
Against imperialism, against arrogance and tyranny. Wherever
we turn, we find the same racial opposition to oppression and
humiliation, by any power whatsoever. That is why it has been
difficult for any dictatorship to be set up in Spain. When it was
implanted it was more like an operetta. And when the attempt
arose to establish a real dictatorship the people rose in rebel-
lon, preferring death to slavery.

The socialists have inherited a centralist tendency as a conse-
quence of the authoritarian teachings of Marx. But they must
adapt themselves to the reality in Spain as we have done with
the teachings of Bakunin.

The republicans are, of necessity, federalists, since federal-
ism is the essence of all democracies. And, lastly, we anarchists
who have created the ideal and the conception of the individual
from the social cell that is man, are federalists.

Consequently, when the war is over, a plebiscite will be
taken in each region through public assemblies, to decide by
popular expression:

1. The form of political unity through which the new Spain
   will be constituted.

2. The form of economic unity which will direct the destiny
   of the new Spain.

And we will accept the creation of the Iberian Federation
of a socialist republic which will give each region the right to
construct its life in accordance with its economic possibilities
and political preponderance. From this confederal conception
and from this federal interpretation of the regional necessities
will evolve, for the first time, a really great and strong Spain.

Until now Spain has been a country with an enormous,
richly adorned head-Madrid. But the lacerated body were
the regions without water; regions lacking the elemental
necessities of life. Only in the regions around the coast has
there been material progress, as a result of their contact
with the outside world: and what autonomy they did have
was due to their distance from Madrid. When regions like
Extremadura, Andalusia, Galicia, Aragon and Levante become
federated, we will see the end of the tragic emigration of some
of the best men who go to seek their fortune in other lands. In
the freely federated autonomous regions there will be ample
opportunity to employ their initiative and capabilities on their
native soil. And it is then that a new Spain will be created. The
Spain pregnated by Primo de Rivera and the Republic of 14th
April, but never realised. The impoverished and unproductive
regions of Castille, Extremadura and Andalusia bear sad
witness to the failure of a centralised political doctrine.

On the economical side we have been elaborating a definite
constructive programme having as its basis the economic unity